
To prevent and treat disease and disability; to promote healthy lifestyles; and to protect and promote the health and quality of our environment.

NEWS

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Bioterrorism planning gets underway at Central District Health Department

BOISE, Idaho, August 26, 2002 – The Central District Health Department (CDHD) has formed the Office of Public Health Preparedness to expand the department's ability to respond to an outbreak of disease or acts of bioterrorism. The Preparedness Unit is being funded through a \$7.8 million federal grant from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to the state of Idaho. CDHD will receive \$400,000 annually to coordinate the local area program.

The federal grant addresses six areas in which the state will increase its capacity to respond. These are public health planning, epidemiology, laboratory testing, professional development, public risk communications and information dissemination, and expansion of the current Health Alert Network. New staff has been put in place to address each of these areas **(see attached staff list).**

According to Kathy Holley, CDHD director, preparedness staff will work with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, hospitals, laboratories, medical providers, emergency responders, the media and Idaho's six other public health districts to develop a statewide strategy to prepare and respond to public health emergencies.

Holley said the staff in the Preparedness Unit each have extensive backgrounds in their areas of expertise, and will provide strong leadership and resources to the statewide effort. "A strong public health system is necessary to detect and respond to outbreaks whether they result from bioterrorism or occur naturally," she said. "That means well-trained people equipped with

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the right tools working together in partnership. With this new funding and new team in place, we have an important opportunity to better serve our community in the event of any disease outbreak or public health emergency, and we are eager to move into full force with our planning and implementation efforts.”

For more information call Rob Howarth at Central District Health Department,
(208) 327-8577.

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NOTE: STAFF LIST ATTACHED

CDHD Public Health Preparedness Unit staff members:

- **Rob Howarth, Preparedness Program Manager.** Howarth supervises the overall planning and implementation of the district's preparedness program, including planning and readiness assessment, surveillance and epidemiology capacity, health alert technology, risk communication, and education and training. Prior to joining CDHD Howarth worked as an Environmental Hydrogeologist for the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality where he oversaw the investigation and cleanup of environmental contaminants, monitored and assessed landfills and ground water contamination projects and performed environmental research.
- **Darcus Allen, Program Planner.** Allen is responsible for coordinating the development of hospital and public health preparedness planning efforts and emergency response plans to assure that systems are in place for early detection and response to high priority communicable diseases, and developing a plan to receive and manage items from the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile. Allen previously was employed by the US Air Force where she provided training to military personnel in anti-terrorism procedures and recognition, planned and executed reception and deployment of personnel and equipment, and planned and implemented exercises to test military personnel skills.
- **Patti Murphy, Public Information Officer.** Murphy is responsible for assessing the district's current public information systems and developing a plan that will enhance CDHD's capacity to communicate with and educate the public about disease outbreaks, acts of bioterrorism and other public health emergencies. Before joining CDHD, Murphy was the community relations coordinator with the Boise City Parks & Recreation Department. Her professional background includes six years as public information officer for the Arizona Department of Health Services in Phoenix where she provided communications on a variety of public health issues, outbreaks and emergencies.
- **Tammy Wallace, Information Technology Analyst.** Wallace will assess the district's current technical infrastructure capacity and develop a plan to ensure critical communications connectivity among public health departments, health care organizations, law enforcement and other emergency response agencies. She will develop a method of communication for respondents in public health emergencies that utilizes a primary and/ or backup e-mail and Internet connection. Wallace has been with the CDHD since 1999. She has previous public health experience and has worked in the Information Systems field since 1997.
- **Dieuwke Spencer, RN, EHS, Epidemiology and Surveillance.** Spencer has been the Supervisor of the CDHD Office of Epidemiology since 1999. She will oversee the development of a system to receive and evaluate urgent disease reports from all parts of the district on a 24-hour per day, 7 day a week basis.
- **Tanisha Townsend, Administrative Assistant.** Townsend will serve as liaison between the Public Health Preparedness Unit and public health departments, health care organizations, law enforcement and other emergency response agencies as well as the general public. She will manage records for the unit, coordinate meetings and provide general administrative support to unit staff. Townsend most recently worked in the CDHD Immunization Program and has served in the US Air Force as a Surveillance Technician.